

Message Text

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ACTION AF-04

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4100

INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ADDIS ABABA 4510

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MASS, ET, US

SUBJECT: DISCUSSION WITH PMAC CHAIRMAN ON US-ETHIOPIAN
RELATIONS AND US ARMS ASSISTANCE

1. PMAC CHAIRMAN TEFERI BANTE TOOK ADVANTAGE OF MY
90-MINUTE CALL ON HIM YESTERDAY MORNING REGARDING
NEGOTIATIONS ON THE ERITREAN PROBLEM (SEPTTEL) TO
DISCUSS CALMLY BUT VERY CANDIDLY NUMEROUS COMPLAINTS WHICH THE EPMG
PRESENTLY HAS REGARDING THE BASIC ATTITUDE OF THE USG TOWARDS
THE EPMG, PARTICULARLY IN THE FIELD OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE.

2. THE GIST OF TEFERI BANTE'S LENGTHY REMARKS ON ARMS
ASSISTANCE WAS THAT THE EPMG HAS BEEN STRIVING WITH LITTLE
SUCCESS FOR OVER A YEAR TO SECURE ARMS FROM THE USG ON THE
BASIS OF AN URGENT EMERGENCY. IT HAD ANTICIPATED A
PROMPT AND EFFECTIVE RESPONSE BECAUSE OF THE TRADITIONAL
CLOSE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, BUT THIS
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RESPONSE HAD NOT BEEN FORTHCOMING. THE USG RESPONSE

HAS IN FACE BEEN A GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT TO THE EPMG. THERE HAS BEEN MUCH TALK OF PROBLEMS WITH CONGRESS AND PUBLIC OPINION IN THE US, BUT THE EPMG DOES NOT BELIEVE THE ADMINISTRATION HAS MADE AN ADEQUATE EFFORT TO ENLIST SUPPORT FOR EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE TO THE EPMG. THE EPMG HAS ALSO BEEN DISTRESSED BY THERECENT PREMATURE PUBLICITY REGARDING NETOTIATIONS ON THE SUPPLY OF AMMUNITION, AND THE USG SHOULD NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPACT WHICH THIS PUBLICITY HAS HAD ON US-ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS. ALL OF THIS RECORD HAS RAISED SERIOUS DOUBTS IN THE EPMG REGARDING THE TRUE INTENTIONS OF THE USG. THE EPMG CONSIDERS THE RELUCTANCE OF THE USG TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE AND TIMELY ASSISTANCE AN INDICATION OF ITS UNDERLYING ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE EPMG. WE SAY THIS IN ALL CANDOR BECAUSE COMPLETE CANDOR IS NECESSARY IF WE WISH TO MAINTAIN OUR GOOD RELATIONS. IT IS TRUE THAT US OFFICIALS HAVE FROM TIME TO TIME EXPRESSED THEIR VERBAL SUPPORT FOR THE CHANGES THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN ETHIOPIA, BUT SOME OF THE US ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES HAVE BEEN INCONSISTENT WITH THIS SUPPORT. THIS HAS BEEN ALL THE MORE SURPRISING BECAUSE AMERICANS TRADITIONALLY APPRECIATE PEOPLE WHO HELP THEMSELVES AND THE RECENT CHANGES IN ETHIOPIA WILL FINALLY ENABLE THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THEIR OWN DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS.

3. WITH REGARD TO THE AMMUNITION WHICH THE EPMG HAS PURCHASED AND WHICH HAS NOT YET REACHED ETHIOPIA, THE CHAIRMAN SAID, IT IS DIFFICULT TO TELL WHETHER THE PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES IN DELIVERING IT OF WHICH US OFFICIALS HAVE SPOKEN ARE REAL ONES. IN THIS CASE ALSO WE HAVE DRAWN THE CONCLUSION THAT YOU HAVE NOT PUSHED AS HARD AS YOU SHOULD, OR THAT "YOU HAVE WANTED TO INDICATE YOUR ATTITUDE TO US BY SHOWING SOME RELUCTANCE." THE PUBLICITY WHICH WAS GIVEN BOTH TO OUR REQUEST FOR \$30 MILLION WORTH OF AMMUNITION AND THE USG'S SUBSEQUENT UNWILLINGNESS TO ACCEDE IN FULL TO THIS REQUEST HAS BEEN UNDERSTOOD BY OUR NEIGHBORS AND SOME OF THEM HAVE NOW DECIDED NOT TO GRANT OVERFLIGHT CLEARANCES. WE WERE ALSO MOST UNHAPPY THAT THE PRESS STATEMENT REGARDING THE DECISION TO SELL \$7 MILLSION WORTH OF AMMUNITION WAS IDENTICAL WITH THE CONFIDENTIAL

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ORIGINAL TEXT PRESENTED TO US RATHER THAN THE TEXT WHICH WAS SUBSEQUENTLY "AGREED" BETWEEN US PRIOR TO ISSUANCE OF THE STATEMENT. (COMMENT. THIS CONTENTION IS FLAGRANTLY INACCURATE. THE EMBASSY NEVER "AGREED" TO THE CHANGES REQUESTED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTER, AND THE FINAL REMARKS MADE TO THE PRESS INCORPORATED SOME OF THE CHANGES DESIRED BY THE EPMG. END COMMENT.) THE EPMG WAS ALSO ASTONISHED BY THE ONE-SIDED REFERENCE TO

ATROCITIES COMMITTED BY ETHIOPIAN MILITARY FORCES WHICH WAS CONTAINED IN THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE PRESENTED TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY.

4. OTHER INDICATIONS OF ALLEGEDLY UNFRIENDLY USG ATTITUDES CITED BY TEFERI BANTE WERE THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE TENNECO OIL EXPLORATION COMPANY LAST YEAR "OSTENSIBLY FOR REASONS OF SECURITY," AND THE WITHDRAWAL OF SOME AID-SPONSORED PROFESSORS FROM THE UNIVERSITY "OSTENSIBLY FOR SECURITY REASONS." (COMMENT. BOTH OF THESE WITHDRAWALS HAD BEEN EXPLAINED TO TEFERI BANTE IN NON-SECURITY TERMS BY CHARGE WYMAN ON FEBRUARY 1. SEE ADDIS 1253.)

5. IN CONCLUSION AND IN SUMMARY, THE CHAIRMAN REMARKED THAT THE EMERGENCY APPROACH OF THE EPMG TO THE US FOR ARMS ASSISTANCE HAD BEEN SUFFICIENT INDICATION OF ITS INTENTION TO CONTINUE GOOD RELATIONS, BUT THAT THE USG "HAD NOT RECIPROCATED IN LIKE MEASURE." HE HOPED THAT THE USG WOULD NOW "CHANGE ITS ATTITUDE AND MEET FULLY OUR DESIRE TO CONTINUE THE LONG AND HAPPY COOPERATION" BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. HE WISHED, HOWEVER, TO EXPRESS THE EPMG'S GRATITUDE FOR THE "TIMELY AND GENEROUS" HELP THE USG HAD PROVIDED IN THE FIELD OF DROUGHT RELIEF.

6. I RESPONDED THAT I WOULD ALSO BE VERY FRANK. I COULD SEE THAT MY JOB WAS GOING TO BE MORE DIFFICULT THAN I HAD THOUGHT BECAUSE OF THE GREAT GAP EXISTING BETWEEN OUR UNDERSTANDINGS OF EACH OTHER. THE CHAIRMAN HAD DISCUSSED A LARGE NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS AND HAD CHALLENGED THE MOTIVATIONS OF MY GOVERNMENT. EXCEPT FOR CITING THE DROUGHT RELIEF PROGRAM, HE HAD MADE NO MENTION OF OTHER VERY SUBSTANTIAL ECONOMIC AND MILITARY AID PROGRAMS
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THAT HAD BEEN GOING ON SMOOTHLY AND IN SUBSTANTIAL VOLUME. I SAID I WAS DISTRESSED THAT THE CHAIRMAN APPARENTLY BELIEVED THAT THE USG DID NOT REALLY WANT TO HELP THE EPMG AT ALL. I FOUND THIS CONCLUSION SURPRISING AND NOT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FACTS.

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7. I THEN ANSWERED SOME OF THE CHAIRMAN'S SPECIFIC COMPLAINTS, POINTING OUT THAT VERY SUBSTANTIAL MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM HAD BEEN GOING ON THROUGHOUT THIS PERIOD; THAT THE DELIVERIES OF AMMUNITION HAD BEEN HELD UP BY OVERFLIGHT DIFFICULTIES WHICH ONLY NOW WERE BEING OVERCOME BY SWITCHING FROM COMMERCIAL TO MAC CARRIERS; THAT THE TENNECO DECISION HAD BEEN MADE BY THE COMPANY FOR ECONOMIC REASONS AND NOT BY THE US; AND THAT THE WITHDRAWAL OF PROFESSORS HAD RESULTED ONLY FROM THE CLOSURE OF THE UNIVERSITY.

8. I TOLD THE CHAIRMAN THAT I WAS DEEPLY CONCERNED BY THE LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF POLITICAL REALITIES IN MY COUNTRY SHOWN BY HIS REMARKS, AND BY HIS UNWILLINGNESS TO BELIEVE THE STATEMENTS WE MAKE IN GOOD FAITH. I DISCUSSED THIS THEME AT SOME LENGTH, EMPHASIZING THAT DELAYS IN DELIVERIES OF ARMS AND AMMUNITION HAD REFLECTED GENUINE PRACTICAL PROBLEMS, INCLUDING LACK OF AVAILA-
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BILITY, RATHER THAN ANY NEGATIVE ATTITUDE ON OUR PART TOWARDS THE REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES IN ETHIOPIA. THE USG VALUES AND FULLY APPRECIATES THE GOALS OF THE REVOLU-
TIONARY MOVEMENT. I WAS DISTRESSED BY THE MISUNDER-

STANDING OF OUR ACTIONS AND MOTIVATIONS WHICH HAD BEEN REVEALED IN THE CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS AND BY THE LACK OF APPRECIATION OF THE REAL EFFORTS THE USG HAD MADE TO MEET ETHIOPIAN NEEDS. IT WOULD BE DESIRABLE TO TALK FURTHER IN THE FUTRE REGARDING THE MANY MATTERS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN HAD RAISED IN THE COURSE OF HIS REMARKS. IN THE MEANTIME I THOUGH THAT THE ARRIVAL IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS OF MAC AIRCRAFT CONVEYING AMMUNITION WOULD DEMONSTRATE MORE CLEARLY THAN EVER THE REAL NATURE OF US INTENTIONS. I HOPED THAT AS WE CAME TO KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER WE WOULD BE ABLE TO SWEEP AWAY SOME OF THE SUSPICIONS OF WHICH THE CHAIRMAN HAD SPOKEN. IT WAS MY HOPE THAT THE PRESENT CONVERSATION WOULD REPRESENT THE LOWEST POINT IN A RELATIONSHIP THAT WE WANT TO CONDUCT OPENLY AND CANDIDLY.

9. THE CHAIRMAN THEN RETURNED TO HIS THESIS OF US NON-RESPONSIVENESS TO ETHIOPIAN NEEDS, THIS TIME LAYING PARTICULAR STRESS ON THE GREAT THREAT WHICH SOMALIA POSES FOR ETHIOPIA AND ON THE GREAT IMPORTANCE OF RECEIVING EQUIPMENT IN AMPLE TIME TO PERMIT THE TRAINING OF ETHIOPIAN PERSONNEL ON NEW WEAPONS BEFORE THEY ARE ACTUALLY NEEDED IN COMBAT. HE REPEATEDLY REMARKED THAT LAST-MINUTE ARRIVALS OF EQUIPMENT, JUST BEFORE HOSTILITIES BEGAN (THEY BELIEVE POSSIBLY IN JUNE OR JULY) WOULD BE OF NO HELP TO ETHIOPIA. IN CONCLUSION HE SAID THAT ETHIOPIA WISHES GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE US AND THAT IT HOPES THE USG WILL RECIPROCATE. HE HAD BEEN VERY FRANK REGARDING THE EXISTENCE OF PROBLEMS BECAUSE I COULD NOT OTHERWISE CARRY OUT MY PRIMARY DUTY OF IMPROVING RELATIONS. HE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE HELPFUL IF FUTURE EXCHANGES WERE SIMILARLY FRANK.

10. IN RESPONSE I EXPRESSED AGREEMENT THAT ONLY THROUGH FRANK DISCUSSIONS CAN WE UNDERSTAND WHERE PROBLEMS LIE AND DISCOVER HOW TO REDUCE THEM. I HOPED THROUGH THIS CONVERSATION AND SIMILAR ONES IN THE FUTURE TO PERSUADE

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HIM AND HIS COLLEAGUES TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THEIR OWN UNWARRANTED SUSPICIONS AND THE VERY REAL PROBLEMS WE HAVE IN SUPPLYING ARMS AND AMMUNITION AS RAPIDLY AS DESIRED, AND THAT THE DELAYS ARE NOT DUE TO A HALF-HEARTED ATTITUDE.

11. IN CONCLUSION I REFERRED TO CURRENT RUMORS IN ADDIS REGARDING POSSIBLE EXECUTIONS OF POLITICAL PRISONERS. THIS DISCUSSION HAS BEEN REPORTED IN A DIFFERENT CHANNEL.

12. COMMENT. THERE IS A SUBSTANTIAL COMPONENT OF GAMES-

MANSHIP IN THE CHAIRMAN'S COMPLAINTS; IT IS, I AM TOLD, A FAMILIAR ETHIOPIAN TECHNIQUE TO TAKE THE OFFENSIVE, AND TO OVERSTATE THE CASE DELIBERATELY. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE IMPORTANT COMPONENTS OF THE DIRG THAT ARE GENUINELY IGNORANT OF ANY PERTINENT FACTORS OTHER THAN THEIR OWN DEMANDS. DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL THAT DIRG HAS POOR RECORD OF CONSULTATIONS WITH MINISTRIES IN WHICH RELEVANT EXPERTISE RESIDES. THIS REALITY LIKELY PLAYED A ROLE HERE, WITH DIRG'S SUSPICIONS AS RESULT. CONTRIBUTING THERETO WOULD ALSO BE EFFORTS OF THOSE DIRG MEMBERS WORKING TO STRAIN USG-EPMG RELATIONSHIP AS WELL AS AN IDEOLOGICAL PREDISPOSITION ON THE PART OF MANY DIRG MEMBERS TO MISREAD USG ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE NEW ETHIOPIA. CHAIRMAN TEFERI HIMSELF IS PROBABLY MUCH MORE UNDERSTANDING OF THE REAL PROBLEM OF US POLICY (AND MILITARY AVAILABILITIES) THAN HE INDICATED. HOWEVER, HIS WHOLE APPROACH WAS UNDOUBTEDLY DICTATED BY AN INNER GROUP OF DIRG LEADERS, FOR WHOM THE CHAIRMAN IS ONLY THE FIGUREHEAD. THUS WE ARE DEALING, AND WILL HAVE TO CONTINUE TO DEAL, NOT DIRECTLY WITH A LEADER BUT WITH A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE DIRG COMMITTEE SYSTEM WHO IS HIMSELF NOT GIVEN ANY AUTHORITY EITHER TO MAKE DECISIONS ON THE SPOT OR TO CONCEDE ON ANY POINT OF SUBSTANCE. BOTH FONMIN AND DEFMIN HAVE PRIVATELY WARNED ME AND OTHERS THAT "THE DIRG DOES NOT UNDERSTAND"; BOTH OF THESE OFFICIALS, AND MANY OTHERS IN EPMG, FACE PROBLEMS IN THEIR OWN DEALINGS WITH THE DIRG SIMILAR TO THOSE THE EMBASSY FACES.

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13. THE SCHEDULED ARRIVAL OF THE FIRST AMMO AIRLIFT, AND THE COMPLETION OF THE AIRLIFT IN A FEW WEEKS, SHOULD HELP CLEAR THE ATMOSPHERE. BUT ACTUAL UNAVAILABILITY OF A NUMBER OF ITEMS THE GOE WANTS TO HAVE IN HAND BY JUNE TO COUNTER THE "SOMALI THREAT" (F-5E'S, RADAR, ETC.) WILL REMAIN A SORE POINT. I PLAN TO SCHEDULE REGULAR MEETINGS WITH THE CHAIRMAN TO SEE IF SOME HEADWAY CAN BE MADE AGAINST THE SIMPLE-MINDED SUSPICIONS THAT WERE DISPLAYED. IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT AT NO TIME DID THE CHAIRMAN HINT THAT THE EPMG MIGHT TURN ELSEWHERE FOR MILITARY OR OTHER SUPPORT; IN EARLIER CONVERSATIONS (INCLUDING WITH PREVIOUS CHAIRMAN AMAN) THIS THREAT WAS OFTEN EMPLOYED.

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